

# BROKEN LOCATIONS

## Small Black Box #26 Re:port

### By Luke Jaaniste

#### RE:

Small Black Box #26  
Sunday 27 July 2003, 7-10PM  
Institute of Modern Art, Screening Room  
Fortitude Valley, Brisbane Australia  
SPECIAL QLD BIENNIAL FESTIVAL OF MUSIC EDITION

Camilla Hannan - Melbourne  
(digital surround sound field recordings)  
resi-quat - Brisbane  
Adam Park (tape collage)  
Machina aux Rock - Melbourne  
Stephen Masterson (live drum kit)  
Nat Bates (digital effects/gating)

#### REPORT:

##### Camilla Hannan

Camilla, a Melbourne-based installation and surround sound artist, sat in the middle of the seated audience, at the mixing desk, and played us field recordings she has made (and effected?) in six-channel surround sound (2 subs, 4 woofers). Nothing to see except fiddling with the mixer knobs.

*"... a very visceral experience indeed, one that both teased and tormented the senses..."*

*"... a dark immersive journey with many turns and a few twists..."*

*"... Hannan constructed for us successive walls of sound - truly a liquid architecture of industrial audio waste..."*

##### resi-quat

Like Camilla, local noise artist Adam Park sat at the mixing desk. But instead of playing digital field recordings, he created a real-time tape collage using through three old cassette tape decks and a stack of tapes that were each in and of themselves collages he had previously made from an assortment of 'found tapes' - old swooning songs, spoken word, pop, swing etc.

*"... a sensitive chopped-up soundscape..."*

*"... another sensitive example of DIY noise alchemy..."*

*"... dirty, dingy, distorted, decaying - what fun!..."*

##### Machina aux Rock

The screening room was emptied of all its chairs for this last set. Stephen Masterton sat on one side of the room, playing rock riffs on a stripped back rock drum kit (bass, floor tom, snare, crash, hit-hat). Two microphones took signals from the kit (from the bass and snare) into the digital mixing and effects deck that Nat Bates was controlling on the opposite side of the room. Beside Nat was an electric guitar constantly played by two doctored electric fans operating with a whipper-snipper effect. This guitar drone was then fed into the effects rack. The overall sound worked by having the drum microphones gate against the effected guitar sounds, so that the effected was that the drum heads had the sound of the processed, constantly-evolving guitar drone. Multi-coloured chaser lights in the far corners constantly flashing throughout.

*"... hard-hitting rock swirling with electronic ambience..."*

*"... a high-energy performance that takes rock drumming to a whole new distorted level..."*

*"... loud, aggressive, gorgeous rhythms - Machina aux Rock really does rock..."*

*"... for a duo that begun as a recording project, this was one hell of a live performance. It got me in the guts, the hips and the head..."*

#### PORT:

At SBB #26 we saw and heard the bastardisation of three different types of locations:

Camilla Hannan... masked *environmental* locations  
resi-quat... semi-masked *stylistic* locations  
Machina aux Rock... un-masked *instrumental* locations

Helpful in this discussion is Shove and Repp's concept of "ecological listening" [1], which is they say the primary function of the auditory system, the 'animal instinct' that enable humans to determine:

- direction: where did that sound come from (eg, behind me)
- distance: how far away was the sound made (eg, half a mile)
- object: what object contributed the sound (eg, a tree)
- action: what action did the object undergo to make sound (eg, breaking)

In short, "the listener may directly perceive the environmental objects, surfaces or substances involved in the [sonic] event" [2].

Before the advent of reproductive audio technologies in the late 19th Century, *the locality established through ecological listening was only and always the location of the listener*. Since, however, the advent of reproductive technologies (the phonograph 1877; the gramophone 1888; 78rpm records 1915; 33rpm records 1928; magnetic tape 1940s; 45rpm records 1940s; transistor 1948; digital recording from 1967; CD 1982; CDr 1991; DVD 1997) [3], ecological listening has never been the same.

*The simple and direct nature of ecological listening has evolved into a web of intersecting ecologies*, involving localities that are not the 'real' locality of the listener, but recorded, reproduced, mediated, and virtualised localities drawn from the world 'beyond' that immediately contactable by the listener's physical presence. Sounds and music that involve reproductive technologies create situations where the 'real' ecology of the listener is often interacting with other 'mediated' ecologies. At the very least, ecological listening is involved in determining:

- stylistic data: who, when, where, why, cultural functionality
- production technology & fidelity: what recorded it, what reproduced it
- the acoustic space: in what acoustic was this produced or recorded

Hannan developed a complex acoustic ecology by mixing and matching field recordings she has taken from industrial urban environments. But the ecologies were masked - it was difficult to know what we were listening to and where the sounds had come from. It may have been electronically generated white-noises for the most part. Their only clear ecological statement came at the end of her set, when the last sound we heard was the very unmistakable sound of a train. It acted as a kind of cadential key, letting us know in no uncertain terms what was uncertain before - that we were indeed listening to field recordings. Thus Hannan arrived at her tonic or home key or aesthetic locale if you will.

Of course the embodied location of the listeners was another ecology that Hannan was performing, using 6-way surround sound, but this didn't come across to me as a central aesthetic concern of hers in this set. Still, I wouldn't knock back a surround sound experience when it's offered!

For resi-quat, the locations he was capturing and replaying for us weren't physical locations or landscapes, but rather stylistic locations - a landscape of music and other sound recordings pilfered from a whole range of apparent sources - pop, country, blues, television, radio, world, rock. The styles and genres weren't always clear; they were semi-masked. Listening became as much about deciphering what the source was, as listening to the interrelations between the sources.

Machina aux Rock on the other hand didn't take their sounds from any other location than the one we as audience members found ourselves in. The location of their art is the instruments of rock- drums, electric guitar and effect pedals. An instrumental locality unmasked for all to see. But it wasn't always so straight forward; the gating of drum with electronic sounds kept confounding and rearranging our perception of the size and nature of these drums (boomy, tinny, wooden, metallic and more).

This immediacy and directness of location perhaps crystallises the difference between the rock pig and the rave jockey - rock is about the sweaty here and now in a way that electronica and dj-ing is often not, at least from a looking and listening (rather than dancing) point of view. And this difference in instrumental localities and referentialities often play themselves off as cultural and class differences. To me rock has an earthy connotation, electronica an eternal one (connotation is a key word here, as it's certainly not a truth).

Lile resi-quat, it could be said that Machina were also toying with found styles. It wasn't direct quotation or sampling or a translocation however, more like paraphrasing. Their abstracted rock riffs (the sounds of rock) the means for a visceral end that was by far the more central experience for me (the spirit of rock) - a very present locality.

#### REP:

Three archetypal modes of sound sourcing...

- a. found (resi-quat)
- b. recorded (Hannan)
- c. performed (Machina aux Rock)

Three archetypal modes of sound sources...

- a. extant sonic landscape (Hannan)
- b. extant audio recordings (resi-quat)
- c. extant musical instruments (Machina aux Rock)

#### REFERENCES:

[1] Shove Shove, Patrick and Bruno H. Repp. "Musical Motion and Performance: Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives," in *The Practice of Performance*, edited by John Rink (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995, pp55-83). In this essay Shove and Repp actually discuss three levels of human listening: the spatial-based 'ecological' level, the time-based 'structural' level, and the emotional-based 'expressive' level.

[2] Shove and Repp, p59.

[3] Taken from <<http://www.oneoffcd.com/info/historycd.cfm>>